

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

Fourteenth District, Michigan
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

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Conyers Appears in Louisville to Support Call for DOJ Investigation of Police Department Following Shooting of Handcuffed Man

Today, Representative John Conyers, Jr., the Ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, called for an investigation of the practices that led to the shooting of a handcuffed man with an apparent history of mental illness. Conyers stated that "The Department of Justice is investigating scores of police departments across the nation for abuses ranging from excessive force to racial profiling. While the Louisville Police Department will formally cease to exist on January 6, 2003, with the creation of metro government, the policies that allowed the tragic shooting of James Edward Taylor should not escape formal pattern and practice review by the Department of Justice."

Noting the litany of controversial police shootings in major cities across the country, Conyers stated that "The shooting of a handcuffed suspect should set off alarm bells that call for federal scrutiny. The FBI investigation of criminal conduct in the incident is a good start, but the problem clearly goes deeper. The facts that the department has a Crisis Intervention Team training program to handle encounters with the mentally ill and that the use of force training programs were passed in a report by the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives mean that something has gone wrong at the street level."

Conyers explained that the Department of Justice uses its statutory pattern and practice authority under 42 U.S.C. § 14141 and the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (42 U.S.C. § 3789d(c)) to investigate the systemic problems of law enforcement agencies, including: false arrest; discriminatory harassment, stops, searches or seizures (best known as racial profiling); retaliation against persons alleging misconduct; and intentional racial or ethnic discrimination.

Stressing the need for community involvement in the process, Conyers stated that "Your participation today and hereafter will have a direct effect on the decisions of the Department of Justice. Therefore, I encourage you to engage the government and make your voice heard. The issues are not limited to the 5 deadly force shootings of African-American men since 2000, but encompass the full range of interactions between citizens and the police. We must let the Department be left with no question concerning the merit of an investigation."

Conyers stressed that, "Our community's relationship with its police department has reached a level of unprecedented volatility. Absent a climate of trust and accountability, your needs are not served and the jobs of the police officers become more difficult and dangerous. We must use the tragedy of the James Edward Taylor shooting to create a new relationship with the police - one founded on community accountability. Only then can we begin to address the full range of issues that result in the disparate incarceration of African-Americans and achieve equal justice."

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